



REGIONAL DIFFERENCES IN EDUCATION

Prof. Rimantas Želvys

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INTRODUCTION

There is a great variety of education systems in the world. Although, similar principle goals are set for the education in most countries, the ways of implementing the goals are different. Structural differences are one of the sources of the variety of education systems. Different countries use different principles in restructuring educational institutions and there is different number of education levels in the existing education systems. The most simple education system model contains only two levels – that of schools and that of a ministry. Such a model exists, for instance, in New Zealand, but there are comparatively few instances of such a model in the world. The model of education system made up from school, municipal and ministerial levels is much more widespread. Such a model existed until the middle of the 1990-ies in Lithuania. One more possible variant comprises the levels of schools, local and regional governments. Regional level is represented by lands, states, and counties or otherwise called territorial units. Typical example of such a system is the education system of the USA, where all the education matters are managed on the state level and such a central structure, as federal ministry of education is non-existent. Finally, there is a model of education system made up from schools, municipalities, regional educational departments and a ministry.

Lithuanian education system switched to the model in 1994 after the Republic of Lithuania Law on the Governing of the County had been approved. Doubtless, such a multi-level model is the most complicated and requires an adequately developed administrative capacity. There were different reasons, which determined the choice of the multi-level system in different countries. One of the most typical reasons was the size of a country. It is too complicated for a central educational structure to directly maintain ties with numerous local educational divisions in the countries with big territory and/or big number of the population. It was especially difficult or entirely impossible in the colonial states with the territories scattered far away in different parts of the world. Therefore, the existence of regional educational divisions in the big states was dictated by an inevitable necessity. Multi-ethnicity of the country was another reason for the emergence of the regional educational divisions. Partially autonomous education systems with separate regional education management divisions were often created in the heterogeneous states, embracing the citizens of different nationalities. That was being done taking into account specific regional demands and the goals of the nations, populating the regions (for instance, to teach children in their native language according the settled customs or religious traditions.) Significant social and economic differences among individual regions came as the third reason. It was difficult to implement a uniform education policy in the countries with fairly big differences between individual regions: every region needed its own regional education policy to be implemented by fairly independent regional educational divisions. The fourth reason is linked to the democratic development. Regional education divisions, especially in the countries where regional authorities are elected, helps to engage wider layers of the population into the management of the education, take into account the needs of both local communities and the region as a whole. The argument is often mentioned in connection to the education

organisation principles of the Scandinavian countries, which have regional educational divisions. The reforms of the governance decentralisation are the fifth reason. If the authors of the administrative reform are unwilling to make radical moves and to directly delegate the formerly centralised functions of education management to municipalities, they may opt for an intermediate variant, when a part of responsibilities of the central education authority are handed to the regional rather than local educational divisions. In such a case, the establishment of the new structural educational divisions contributes to the implementation of a moderate decentralisation of the education system.

MOTIVES FOR THE EMERGENCE OF REGIONAL EDUCATIONAL DEPARTMENTS IN LITHUANIA

We believe that none of the above-mentioned reasons determined the establishment of the educational departments of the counties in Lithuania. Lithuania is not a big country; it has never had colonies. The past decades have proved that the ministry is capable of co-ordinating its actions with the municipalities, measured by dozens rather than hundreds in the country. Lithuania is not a single-nation country, but it has one dominating nation with ethnic minorities not large enough and not living compactly to form territorial autonomies and necessitate an autonomous system of education. The argument of education democratisation and involvement of wider layers of the population is irrelevant to Lithuania, because the regional management structures in our country are not elected by general vote, but are appointed by central authorities.

The argument of the decentralisation of the system of education is invalid as well, although it could have become one the more weighty motives for the establishment of the regional educational departments. This is confirmed by the article in the Republic of Lithuania Law on Education, determining the competence of the governor of the county. According to the present edition of the Republic of Lithuania Law on Education, the 12 items of the article of the law in question determine the competence of the county governor in the area of education. We believe that the content of the items does not confirm that the establishment of the counties reduced the degree of centralisation of the education system of Lithuania. For example, the county governor establishes, reorganises and liquidates the subordinate educational institutions and appoints and dismisses their heads only upon the written approval of the Ministry of Education and Science. The establishment, reorganisation and liquidation of the educational departments at the administration of the county governor is also possible only upon the written agreement of the Ministry of Education and Science. The heads of the educational departments of the county government are appointed by way of a public tender, approved by the Government on the recommendation of the Ministry of Education and Science. It is evident that the county has no authority to make independent decisions in the area. The county governor approves in writing the establishment, reorganisation and liquidation of the

non-governmental and municipal pre-school, additional training and non-formal adult education institutions in the county, but the education institutions at issue account for a rather small and far from significant part of the educational institutions, and the final decision on the establishment, reorganisation and liquidation thereof could be made by the municipalities themselves. The county governor assures the functioning and maintenance of the subordinate educational institutions, organises and supervises the activity of the subordinate educational institutions, approves the guidelines for their activity. However, there is only one county, Vilnius county, which actually has subordinate elementary, principle and secondary schools, which makes it more an exception than a rule. Other counties have only comprehensive and special boarding schools in subordination. The impression is that the item of the law was formulated especially for Vilnius county. Having solved the disputed issues with the municipalities of Vilnius county by political means, the item could be given up entirely. The county governor supervises the implementation of the general education policy in the state, municipal and non-state educational institutions in the territory of the county. The function of the supervision is evolving into one of the most important functions of the county educational departments. Doubtless, the activity of the educational departments of the county could be concentrated towards supervision, but the ministry and the municipal educational departments successfully executed the function before. The argument, that the establishment of the educational departments in the county will reduce the centralisation of Lithuanian education, is contradicted by the fact that the staff of the education specialists and inspectors held by the municipalities were handed over to the counties to implement the supervision of the general policy of education. Meanwhile, the role of the ministry in the area of education supervision has not decreased actually: an education supervision department executing similar functions was founded instead of the inspection department. Consequently, the area of the education management moved in the opposite direction, towards centralisation rather than decentralisation. The county governor supervises the management of the registration of the school-age children by the municipalities and assures that all the children under the age of 16 residing in the territory of the county would study at a comprehensive or other formal education system school, and takes care of the protection of children rights.

However, the Ministry of Education and Science could also supervise the execution of the registration of the school-age children by the municipalities, if such supervision is needed at all. At the same time the functions of assuring education of the children under the age of 16 and protection of children rights are overlapping because the task has been given to the municipality as well by the Article 38 of the law. The county governor provides conditions for the improvement of skills for the heads and pedagogues of the state educational institutions and organises their appraisal following the procedures set by the Ministry of Education and Science. The function is also overlapping because the Article 38 on the law stipulates that the municipalities also provide conditions for the enhancement of skills for the heads and pedagogues of the subordinate educational institutions and organises their appraisal under the procedures set by the ministry. The county governor registers the educational institutions in the territory of the county in accordance with the procedures set by the Government or its authorised institution. The giving of the function of registration does not represent in any way the expansion of the powers to make independent decisions, because the Government or its authorised institution sets the procedure of the registration. In this sense, another item of the article of the law is more important: the county governor initiates the establishment of the County Council of Education

and other self-governance institutions in the county. It was expected that the item of the law included only into the last edition of the Law on Education would prompt the development of self-governance on the level of counties. However, the developments have not been observed yet. In contrary, as Kaunas Technological University Gymnasium Director R.Burgis suggested, “by imitating real efforts county councils of education are only obstructing the normal work of schools.” (Dialogas, June 2, 2000.) The county governor provides information on the situation of the education and the problems in the county to the Ministry of Education and Science under the procedures set by the ministry. However, the municipalities were also obligated to provide information on the situation and problems of the education. The information is basically the same; the educational division of the county could only sum up the data received from the municipalities and send it over to the ministry. Hardly such a mediator is vital in this case: the ministry may sum up the information received from half a hundred municipalities itself. Finally, the county governor writes a proposal to the representative of the Government in the county over the handing of the functions of the founder of the educational institution to the administration of the county governor, in cases when municipality fails to implement its educational functions set by the legislation. However, the practice of the recent years has shown that similar conflicts are settled by way of court and the municipalities must implement its rulings, therefore, there is no need of changing the founder of the educational institution.

The review of the article of the law leads to a conclusion that the motive of decentralisation cannot be used to explain the emergence of the county educational departments. There is only one explanation left - the county educational divisions were created without any rational basis, coming as a result of the general administrative reform, which was not planned and prepared for in advance by the education reformers. The Government then made a political decision to establish counties (we believe that the idea of regionalism, increasingly more promoted in the EU countries, played a significant part in the decision) and started thinking afterwards which functions could be delegated to the newly formed structure. The emergence of the county educational departments destroyed the settled order of the function sharing among the separate links of the education system. The search for the new optimal function sharing model has continued up till present, with little success, though, because some of the functions executed by the educational departments are overlapping in the current system as well, and the problem of incompatibility of different education levels has yet to be solved.

REGIONAL DIFFERENCES IN THE STATISTICS OF EDUCATION

The counties are an artificial formation in the present Lithuanian education system, “conceived” by the forces, acting outside the education system. How much is the administrative division reflecting the regional differences of the education system of Lithuania? The question will be answered with the help of some education statistics data at hand.

Table 1. General indicators of education statistics in the counties (1998-99)

Counties	Vilnius	Kaunas	Klaipėda	Šiauliai	Panevėžys	Utena	Marijampolė	Alytus	Tešiai	Tauragė
Number of municipalities	7	8	7	7	6	6	4	5	3	3
Number of educational institutions in the municipality	741	576	378	386	319	268	235	201	189	152
Number of institutions subordinate to the county	45	16	14	9	9	7	4	8	6	3
Number of pre-school educational institutions	204	146	77	73	62	41	34	36	32	14
Number of places therein	22747	15786	10611	7607	7521	4090	2901	4547	3590	1800
Number of comprehensive schools	449	383	256	273	233	170	186	154	142	129
Number of students therein	136328	109647	68828	64650	49717	32146	32894	32121	32235	22274
Number of gymnasium students	4334	4131	2828	1460	1416	1412	674	223	672	427
Number of vocational schools	20	17	12	14	10	4	6	10	4	3
Number of students therein	11261	12586	7631	7123	4525	2664	2956	3805	2364	1527
Number of tertiary schools	20	17	12	5	7	3	2	1	2	1
Number of students therein	11687	7908	5000	2204	2144	1589	1514	897	620	318
Number of higher schools	7	6	1	1	-	-	-	-	-	-

Sources: Ministry of Education and Science (1999), State Dept. of Statistics (1999)

The first eye-catching difference, based on statistical data, is the evident difference in the size of the counties. First of all, the counties embrace a different number of municipalities. The counties are made up from 8 (Kaunas) to 3 (Telšiai and Tauragė) municipalities. There are five times more educational institutions in Vilnius county than in Tauragė county. Vilnius county is standing out with the number of the educational institutions subordinate to the county as well. There are three times more institutions in Vilnius county than in Kaunas and Klaipėda counties, closest by their sizes and even 15 times more than in Tauragė county. There are nearly 15 times

more of pre-school educational institutions in Vilnius county than in Tauragė county, and there are 12 times more places therein. The differences are decreasing only in the comprehensive education sector. There are only three and a half times more comprehensive schools in Vilnius county than in Tauragė county, and there are six times more students therein. However, there are big disproportions in this case as well. It is enough to say that the aforementioned criteria make some Vilnius county municipalities amount to or even exceed the entire Tauragė county. For example, Vilnius city has nearly as many comprehensive schools and four times more students than Tauragė county. The number of gymnasium students in Vilnius county exceeds the numbers in Tauragė county tenfold.

The statistical indicators in vocational training sector are also marked by significant differences. Kaunas county has seven times more vocational schools than Tauragė county. The number of vocational school students in the counties is eight times bigger in Kaunas county. The same could be said about the tertiary schools. In 1999, Vilnius county had 20 tertiary education schools, while Tauragė county had only one. The number of tertiary education school students in the counties is different 37 times. The blatant disproportion is characteristic of the higher education as well. Higher schools exist only in four counties with big differences among each other. Vilnius and Kaunas counties have respectively seven and six higher schools, while Klaipėda and Šiauliai counties have only one each. One may hope that the disproportion would reduce the formation of non-university type higher schools, colleges. The process could lead to the establishment of at least one higher school in all the counties.

What conclusions could be made about the statistical data? If the counties have been established without taking into account traditional-historical or social-economic motives (which are absent, to our opinion), the disproportion among the counties are hardly comprehensible. If the differences according to the separate education indicators amount to and sometimes exceed dozens of times, the counties can hardly form education policy in their region to the same degree. For example, the regional policy of vocational training, youth employment and labour market supply with necessary experts could be formed in principle in Kaunas or Vilnius counties, which have several dozens of vocational schools, but that is hardly possible in Telšiai or Tauragė counties. Klaipėda and Šiauliai counties could plan a better utilisation of the regional profiles of Klaipėda and Šiauliai universities in preparing high-skilled employees for specific economy or culture areas, but the counties with no universities are absolutely unable to purposefully plan the increase of the specialists with higher education. It seems illogical that, for instance, Vilnius city council educational department, potentially having great prospects of education policy formation and implementation, is formally on a lower level in the hierarchy of the education system than, say, Tauragė county educational department.

SUPERVISION OF EDUCATION AS A DOMINATING FUNCTION OF THE REGIONAL EDUCATIONAL DEPARTMENTS

Was any thought given at all to the possibility of forming regional education policy when counties were being established? Lithuanian concept of education of 1992 says that the municipality educational department is responsible for drafting and implementation of the regional education development programmes. In the present variant of the Law on Education the municipality was not delegated the function, but a county was not authorised in any way to execute the regional development of education as well. The law obligated the county to only supervise the implementation of the general education policy in its territory. Therefore, the principle function is that of the supervision rather than formation of an independent policy. The assumption that there is no significant role envisaged in the formation of the education policy to the county educational departments is confirmed by the fact, for example, that the vocational or tertiary education schools have not been handed to the jurisdiction of the county. In general, only several per cent out of all the active educational institutions in the country are directly subordinate to the counties. The municipalities, which have the pre-school education institutions, comprehensive primary, principle and secondary schools as their subordinates, have more opportunities in the sense.

To conclude, the uneven distribution of the network of the training institutions and students in the counties was not determined by any rational motive and evolved accidentally. The distribution does not provide equal opportunities for successful implementation of the targeted education development in all the counties. On the other hand, it seems that there have never been plans to hand the function of the regional education policy formation to the counties. Another function, that of supervision, came into the focus. The Ministry of Education and Science has set the following functions to the county State Inspectorate of Education in the areas of state education policy implementation:

- ✓ the implementation of the education changes – to supervise the implementation of education changes in the county in accordance with an annual plan, which has annual inspections ordered by the Ministry of Education and Science as its part;
- ✓ external audit – to analyse statistical data and the materials of external audit, evaluate the situation and changes in the functioning of the county education;
- ✓ accreditation of schools – to evaluate the readiness of schools for accreditation according to the set criteria and procedures;
- ✓ examinations – to watch the process of examinations, check the documents of the examination organisation in the educational institutions, the issuing procedures of the education documents, promptly investigate the violations of examination procedure, if necessary;
- ✓ diagnostic tests – to submit diagnostic tests to schools following the procedure set by the Centre of Examinations;

- ✓ appraisal of the heads of the educational institutions – to evaluate along with the municipal or county government educational departments the compatibility of the heads of the comprehensive education institutions and their deputies with the II and III management categories and recertify the heads and their deputies if serious drawbacks are identified in their performance. Analysis of the progress of appraisal of the heads of the general education institutions;
- ✓ appraisal of the pedagogues of the comprehensive education institutions – to analyse the data of appraisal of the county pedagogues, check the documents of appraisal of the pedagogues of the general education institutions;
- ✓ establishment, reorganisation and liquidation of the educational institutions – to observe and analyse how the municipalities, taking into account the local conditions, implement the goals of the reform of the network of the educational institutions;
- ✓ registers – to analyse general registers of the institutions subordinate to the municipalities and county and draft a county register to be submitted to the ministry;
- ✓ information – to continuously accumulate information on the results of the education quality and the functioning of the education institutions in a county;
- ✓ investigation of complaints and appeals – to investigate when an applicant is unhappy with the investigation results by the founder of the educational institution and propose solutions to the founder.

Certain employees are needed to carry out the supervision functions, listed above, but it seems that there is a lack of the human resources for the task. After the administrative reform the staff of 118 education specialists and inspectors were handed from the municipalities to the counties. In 1999, there were 49 education specialists and inspectors left at the county governments. One inspector was responsible for 275 educational institutions in Utena county, 239 in Marijampolė, 131 in Vilnius, 82 in Panevėžys, 79 in Šiauliai, 74 in Kaunas, 65 in Klaipėda, 49 in Telšiai, 35 in Alytus county, although, an inspector is expected to supervise 30-40 institutions on average. Tauragė county has no inspectors for supervision at all, although its territory houses 155 educational institutions. The chief of the State Inspectorate of Education conducts the supervision in the county. To conclude, the implementation of the supervision function on the level of counties is also facing serious difficulties. On the other hand, a question arises about the justification for the concentration of the supervision function at the county level.

EDUCATION AND QUALIFICATION OF TEACHERS IN THE REGIONS

One of the most important purposes of the education supervision system is the assurance of the adequate education quality. Were the differences in the quality of the education services bigger between the regions, such an attention to the function of supervision on the level of counties would be understandable and justifiable. We decided to compare the counties according to several statistical indicators, which allow judgement about the level of the quality of the education:

- ✓ education and qualification of teachers;
- ✓ results of Matura examinations;

The table below contains data on the numbers of teachers with higher education and certified teachers in the counties.

Table 2. Education and qualification of teachers in the counties (1999-2000)

County	Vilnius	Kaunas	Klaipėda	Šiauliai	Panevėžys	Utena	Marijampolė	Alytus	Telšiai	Tauragė
Number of teachers in day-time comprehensive schools	11411	8602	5370	5274	4029	2953	2710	2605	2457	1828
Teachers with higher education (%)	87,4	85,1	87,8	87,6	86,8	84,7	75,3	82,8	83,2	83,6
Certified teachers (%)	66,3	69,1	68,7	63,4	74,1	69,8	70,3	76,4	75,5	73,2
Certified education heads (%)	66,4	74,3	65,8	62,0	63,2	58,5	59,8	74,8	71,5	59,6

Sources: State Dept. of Statistics (1999), Ministry of Education and Science (2000)

The data shows the clear difference in the numbers of teachers in various counties. This is one more indicator of the aforementioned uneven distribution of the educational institutions according to the counties. Marijampolė county stands out a little with a lower percentage of pedagogues with higher education and respectively greater percentage of teachers with higher education. Doubtless, this was determined by the activity of the Marijampolė Tertiary Pedagogical School, which has become the regional centre of the pedagogue preparation. If Marijampolė Tertiary Pedagogical School acquired the status of a college, the difference would be reduced eventually and maybe would entirely disappear. The percentage of the teachers with

the higher education in the rest of the counties stands between 82.8 (Alytus county) and 87.8 (Klaipėda county) per cent. The difference of five per cent is of little significance. It seems to be natural that the bigger or closer to average percentage (totalling to 85.5 per cent) of pedagogues with higher education is in these counties, where five biggest Lithuanian cities are situated.

In the area of teacher appraisal, a different trend is being observed. An assumption could be made that the teachers of smaller counties are more in a rush to undergo appraisal and acquire a higher qualification category than their counterparts in the bigger counties. The percentage of the certified teachers from counties with the four biggest cities of the country is slightly lower than average, which amounts to 69.2 per cent. Šiauliai county has the lowest number or 63.4 per cent of certified teachers, Alytus county has the highest of 76.4 per cent. The difference is 13 per cent; it is higher than in the area of education, but considerably smaller than the differences between individual municipalities, often belonging to the same county. For example, Varėna county has the greatest number or 88.3 per cent of certified teachers, Šiauliai county has the lowest number or 54.5 per cent. In Ukmergė district and Šalčininkai district, which both belong to Vilnius county, there are respectively 84.7 and 57.8 per cent of certified teachers.

The lowest percentage of certified education heads is in Utena county, where it stands at 58.5 per cent, while Alytus county boasts the biggest number of 74.8 per cent. There is a total of 66.2 per cent of certified education heads in Lithuania. Although the difference between Alytus and Utena counties is greater than 16 per cent, it is a lot higher between individual municipalities. Ukmergė county boasts the highest number of 88 per cent of certified heads, while Kaišiadorys has the lowest of 26 per cent. Greater differences are observed within one county, rather than among several counties. For example, both Kaišiadorys district with 26 per cent of certified heads and Kėdainiai district with 85 per cent of certified heads belong to the same Kaunas county.

The data suggests that the differences between the education and qualification of pedagogues are not big. It could be natural. After adding up arithmetically the indicators of the centre and periphery, big towns and rural districts within the same county, one would draw the result, which would be close to the average. Doubtless, there are certain differences. Statistical data shows that the educational departments in certain counties could be more active in organising the appraisal of pedagogues, the activity trusted them by the Law on Education, and develop at the same time the policy of human resources development in the area of education. On the other hand, the educational departments of the county can hardly influence significantly the growth in the numbers of pedagogues with higher education in their region. As it was mentioned above, there are greater differences in the area of pedagogue qualification between municipalities rather than counties. It seems that the naturally evolved differences in the education of pedagogues lie namely in the municipal level; the main appraisal work is performed at the level and there is greater potential for the development of human resources at the educational institutions at the same time.

RESULTS OF THE STATE MATURA EXAMINATIONS IN THE REGIONS

In 1999, Lithuanian school graduates took for the first time centralised state Matura examinations in mathematics and history. Equal conditions to all the graduates and participation of independent evaluators in the marking of the student examination scripts allowed, to our opinion, to more objectively certificate the level of student achievement. The results of centralised assessments are believed to be one of the significant indicators of the education quality in most countries. The table below contains data on the results of the state Matura examinations in mathematics and history per counties. We chose the percentage of the best performing students (8-10 marks) to make comparisons between the counties.

Table 3. The results of state Matura examinations in the counties (1999)

County	Vilnius	Kaunas	Klaipėda	Šiauliai	Panevėžys	Utena	Marijampolė	Alytus	Telšiai	Tauragė
Took mathematics examination	3207	2362	1056	1054	1323	794	551	700	523	330
Passed 8-10 (%)	37,9	28,2	32,7	25,8	17,7	28,3	19,2	32,1	25,2	35,5
Took history examination	2088	1383	789	743	612	425	298	406	340	184
Passed (8-10) (%)	39,5	34,6	37,6	30,0	33,8	34,6	31,9	38,4	30,0	45,1

Source: National Examinations Centre (1999)

The table shows that the results of state Matura examinations between the counties are different, especially those of the mathematics examination. Vilnius county graduates were best at the state mathematics examination: 37,9 per cent performed for an 8-10 mark. Panevėžys county graduates showed the worst performance, with only 17,7 per cent of students receiving an 8-10 mark. The average of the country stands at 29,7 per cent. Incidentally, the same leaders and the ones lagging behind were determined while applying other calculation principles, i.e. by calculating the percentage of students who received 4-10 or 6-10 marks. The differences in the results of the state Matura examination in history were smaller. Tauragė county students were best at history examination with 45,1 per cent of students receiving an 8-10 mark. Vilnius and Klaipėda county graduates also showed results exceeding the national average, amounting to 36 per cent. The graduates of Šiauliai and Telšiai counties were the worst at the state history examination with 30 per cent of graduates in each of the counties receiving an 8-10 mark. After analysis of the results received in individual municipalities the rule proved correct that the differences between individual municipalities are greater than between the counties.

In 2000, there were five, instead of two state Matura examinations. After an increase in the number of the state examinations, the school graduates were given a greater

freedom of choice. To compare with 1999, the system of evaluation has changed and during the state Matura examinations of 2000, the students were being evaluated according to a 100-point scale. To compare the results of separate examinations according to the counties and to compare the results of the students in 2000 with the showing of the previous year in the same county, we chose for our analysis the percentage of the best performing students (75-100 points).

The results show that it was Telšiai county graduates, who were best at the state mathematics Matura examination in 2000. 28.7 per cent of the students in the county received the 75-100 point mark. Vilnius county graduates were not far behind with 28.1 per cent showing good performance. Šiauliai county made the poorest showing with only 26.1 per cent of students receiving 75-100 points. Alytus county graduates were the most successful at the history examination with 41.3 per cent receiving the highest marks. In Telšiai county the lowest percentage or 16.7 per cent of students got the highest marks. Vilnius county was best at the biology examination (31 per cent), while Tauragė and Alytus counties were the worst with only 17.8 and 17.9 per cent of students respectively making it to 75-100 points. The biggest differences were recorded in the chemistry examination. 58.3 per cent of the graduates in Marijampolė county and only 9.7 per cent of Telšiai county graduates were given excellent marks. To tell the truth, only several dozens of graduates took the chemistry examination, therefore, the data is not important statistically. Klaipėda county was the most successful at the physics examination, as 39.3 per cent of students got the highest marks, while Tauragė county students were the poorest with only 13.2 per cent of graduates ending up with 75-100 points.

Table 4. The results of the state Matura examinations in the counties (2000)

County	Vilnius	Kaunas	Klaipėda	Šiauliai	Panevėžys	Utena	Marijampolė	Alytus	Telšiai	Tauragė
Took mathematics examination	2479	1633	737	778	709	465	355	547	363	216
Passed 75-100 (%)	25,5	28,1	27,7	21,6	23,3	27,5	22,0	22,7	28,7	27,3
Took history examination	2224	1182	671	668	517	418	294	467	389	193
Passed 75-100 (%)	24,8	24,3	26,5	21,3	19,0	24,4	17,3	41,3	16,7	26,4
Took biology examination	355	312	170	188	139	74	90	117	84	73
Passed 75-100 (%)	31,0	28,2	30,6	23,9	30,2	27,0	21,1	17,9	22,6	17,8
Took chemistry examination	233	151	71	52	79	39	24	51	31	22
Passed 75-100 (%)	25,8	27,2	29,6	26,9	34,2	20,5	58,3	17,6	9,7	31,8
Took physics examination	370	110	122	202	105	70	59	84	66	38
Passed 75-100 (%)	27,8	33,6	39,3	18,8	21,9	28,6	25,4	20,2	31,8	13,2

Source: National Examinations Centre (2000)

The analysis of the state Matura examinations showed that it is hardly possible to talk about any significant regional differences in the quality of the student education at the county level. One year brings better state history or mathematics Matura examinations results in one county, another – in another county. Sometimes the same county performs best in one examination, and worst in another (for example, Telšiai county in mathematics and history examinations.) No regularities or trends were noticed, at least for the meanwhile. Greater differences in the sense were observed among the municipalities, yet greater – among the individual schools. It leads to a general conclusion: if the differences in the quality of education services are insignificant at the county level, the focus should be put on the municipalities and reduction of the differences among individual municipalities and especially among schools. In this way the supervision of the education would be seen as a process of assuring the education quality. This would lead to the implementation of the principle of equal opportunities in the education system of Lithuania.

Are such developments to take place in the system of education? What would be further prospects of the regional education development in general? To answer the questions we drafted at least four possible future scenarios.

POSSIBLE SCENARIOS OF FURTHER REGIONAL EDUCATION DEVELOPMENT

The first scenario – everything is left untouched. There will be all 10 counties with its own educational departments existing and retaining their present authority. As it was mentioned above, the opportunities for forming an independent regional policy will remain very limited in such a case. The Law on Education does not require the execution of the policy formation function and the Ministry of Education and Science does not encourage the initiative as well. Moreover, it would be difficult and maybe impossible to some counties to form the general policy to the entire region. Vilnius city and Šalčininkai district municipalities, belonging to the same Vilnius county could be taken as an example. It is evident that there is different workload of educational institutions network, different peculiarities and problems arise in these municipalities. The same could be said about Neringa town and, lets say, Skuodas district municipalities in Klaipėda county. There are numerous examples. Without the development of the function of the regional education policy formation, the supervision function would remain the central one. However, as it was said above, the opportunities of implementing the function with the lack of human resources would be rather restricted. County education divisions are to continue with the sometimes senseless work, duplicating the ministerial and municipal functions and viewed with dislike by the heads of schools and municipal education employees. The sharing of functions among the separate education levels would remain a poignant education reform problem. The probability of the scenario is not big, because the discontent with the present administrative division would most probably lead to a new administrative reform.

The second scenario includes reorganisation of the counties. There are fewer counties left, the former size disproportions are reduced, while administrative division

of Lithuania into counties gains some logic. The logic could be various. Historical cultural logic would prompt the establishment of at least six counties of Aukštaitija, Žemaitija, Dzūkija, Suvalkija, Vilnius Region and Klaipėda Region. Four main ethnographic regions would be another variant. Social-economic logic would push towards five or six counties with the centres in the biggest Lithuanian cities. In all cases, the number of counties should be reduced about twice. Even if the functions of the county educational departments would undergo no change during the reform, the work of the institutions would become more targeted. With the size of the counties becoming similar, there would arise more equal opportunity to plan and implement education development in the region and conduct education supervision work. County educational departments could then take into account the naturally evolved regional specifics, for example, in Vilnius or Klaipėda regions. Surely, no essential breakthrough would be made through administrative redistribution solely, without changing the functions of the county education divisions. The possibility of the scenario is the greatest, but it could only partially solve the issue of sharing functions among different education levels.

The third scenario – Ministry of Education delegates a part of important functions to the county educational departments, whether the reorganisation of counties takes place or not. For instance, vocational, tertiary schools and colleges are handed to counties, no written permission of the ministry is required for the establishment, reorganisation and liquidation of the education institutions subordinate to the county and appointing heads thereof; education supervision function is transferred once and for all from ministerial to the county level, etc. In such a case the influence and power of the county educational departments would increase considerably. In case of radical reform, the ministry could keep only the function of forming general education strategy, what happened, for example, in some Scandinavian countries. As it was said above, the initiators of the administrative reform of 1994 may have expected a similar turn towards decentralisation. However, it did not happen and it is hardly believable it will happen in the future. It is highly unlikely that the Ministry of Education and Science will give up its current powers amid such controversial reforms, like profiling, optimising of the school network and other. It would contradict the centuries old Lithuanian education tradition as well. Gradually, the opposite trend takes shape as the ministry tries to concentrate in its hands as many powers as possible, therefore, the scenario is the least probable out of all that were presented in the research.

The fourth scenario will take place when the county educational departments will be disbanded during the new administrative reform. That will mark the return to the usual Lithuanian education system scheme: ministry – municipality – school. We believe that Lithuanian education system would lose little in such a case. The management of the education system would become simpler. Favourable opportunities would arise to solve entirely or at least to a great extent the issue of function sharing among the different levels of the education system. The issue of handing the main function of the county educational departments, which is that of the supervision, could be solved in a number of ways. It could be returned to the municipalities. An independent supervision (or inspection) centre or centres could be established. Following the English example, temporary inspector teams could be formed from the database of the best specialists in the area. The functions like approval or registration could be easily passed over to other education structures. If a part of the county mandate would be transferred to the municipalities rather than

returned to the ministry, a good opportunity would arise to consequently continue the process of decentralisation of the education system launched a decade ago. The municipalities could take a more active part in the formation of the education policy, while regional education development would be first of all viewed as a development of municipal level education, as was envisaged in the concept of education of 1992. The scenario would be the most acceptable. However, it looks less likely than the second scenario.

We can see that the regional differences in the changing Lithuanian education environment are a relative concept. At the beginning of the previous decade, the regional differences would be most often associated with the differences among municipalities. Now they associate with the differences among the ten existing counties. One can only guess at present what would be the concept of the regional differences in the near future. In any case, there is little doubt that the concept will undergo changes. Therefore, it would come as no surprise if it turned out that the present research would be the last publication, analysing the current regional distribution and related problems before a new administrative reform.

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